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OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2014

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EDITOR'S NOTE

It never seems to get old. We've been at this for four years now—our first run was the October-December 2010 edition, which makes this the fourth anniversary edition (*Yay!*)—but the excitement, stress, and stupefying feeling of being overwhelmed are still there each time I have to put the latest edition to bed. Yet one of the more nagging worries the editorial team had when we started this gig hasn't panned out: We have yet to run out of ideas and subjects and people to feature, thanks mainly to our readers who are enthusiastic enough to point us in the right direction or topic.

In this edition, staff writer Roselyn Monroyo gives particular attention to two of the Commonwealth's sports groups, the Natibu Sports Association and the Saipan Soccer School, both of which have a strong focus on youth development: baseball for Natibu and, of course, soccer for the Saipan Soccer School. Both groups thrive on the premise that building a lifelong commitment to sports means starting them young. Both also have active outreach programs that build not just sports skills but also lifelong skills that their members would carry with them for the rest of their lives. ***See stories on Pages 16 and 20***

Our young correspondent, Thomas Manglona II, has penned two stories for this edition, one about two Mount Carmel students who made it to the 2014 Senior League Baseball World Series and another about one of the newest businesses in town, a Hatha Yoga studio. ***See stories on Page 6 and 8***

Our newest staff writer, Jonathan Perez, who is also a veteran *Saipan Tribune* sports reporter, makes his debut on TAGA *Sports* with a short piece about Saipan's outstanding basketball talents who have a shot at making it big in the world of collegiate and professional sports. ***See story on Page 24***

One of our regular contributors, Jim Rayphand, has co-written a short article on Perry Lo, who, at 70 years old, may just be the oldest soccer player in the Commonwealth. That story is tied to a special spread we have on the Independent Futbol Club. ***See story on Page 13***

Associate editor Mark Rabago rounds out this edition with a feature on Anneka Sakovich, the 1988 NMSA Athlete of the Year. She hasn't been back to the islands since at least 2004. It's been 10 years since and TAGA *Sports* tries to catch up on how this outstanding athlete is doing and what's keeping her busy these days. She hinted, though, that a visit to the islands is in the cards and…well…you'll just have to read about it. ***See story on Page 26***

We hope you'll love what we've cobbled together. As usual, you are free to rave and rant, complain, or point out any mistakes. Or better yet, you can offer suggestions and tips for future topics. Just email them to editor@saipantribune.com and we'll be sure to consider them at our next editorial meeting. Ciao!

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
Editor

COVER ART
The Little Rookies' Kingston C. Deleon Guerrero takes a swing at the ball during one of Natibu Sports Association's tee ball tournaments.

Photography by
LJ Deleon Guerrero

TAGA SPORTS

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OCTOBER - DECEMBER | 2014

HOLDING COURT

Saipan Soccer School hits its goals and vows to boost its programs.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

YOUR HEALTH

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WRITERS' BLOC

ROSELYNMONROYO

Roselyn looks deep into the recesses of her childhood memories as she talks about yearnings for ballgames and fun in the field. Too fond of games, Roselyn's brother would often yell at her to stop playing and come home early for dinner.

MARKRABAGO

Mark covered Anneka Sakovich and the rest of the CNMI delegation in the 2003 South Pacific Games in Suva, Fiji. In the said competition, Sakovich, along with Dirk Sharer and Stephan Samoyloff, won a team bronze medal for the CNMI national triathlon team.

JONATHANPEREZ

Although he's making his debut in this edition of TAGA *Sports*, Jon is no stranger to *Saipan Tribune,* having been its sports reporter for many years. Vertically challenged, Jon abandoned his dreams of becoming a basketball player and decided to pick up a badminton racket.

THOMASA. MANGLONA II

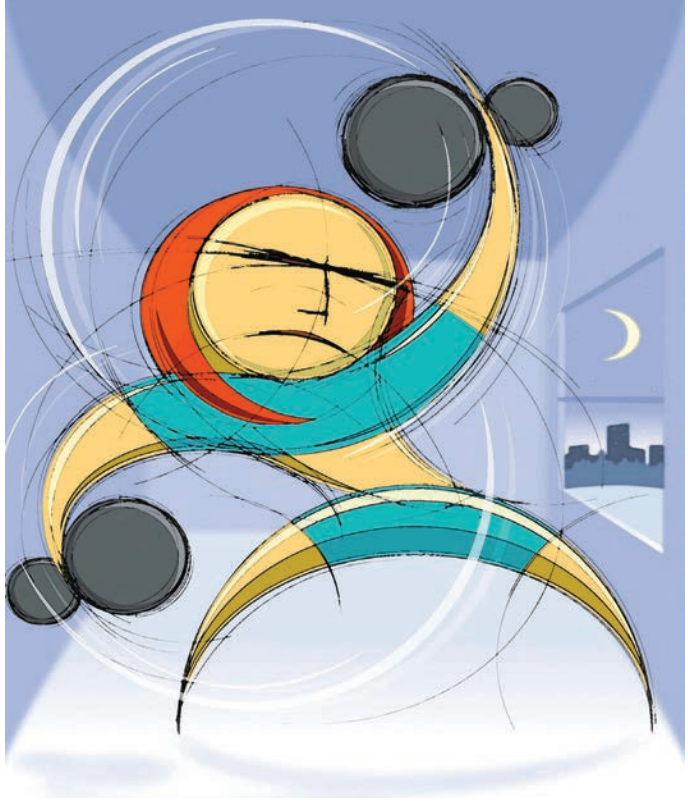
Thomas A. Manglona II is a Mount Carmel School sophomore, writes for the *Saipan Tribune* and *North Star,* and leads a group of students in a broadcast program called Knightly News. This 15-year-old student has a burning passion for journalism and enjoys meeting new people, going to new places, and capturing important community moments.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA *Sports* must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

FITNESS ADDICTS

7 ways your healthy lifestyle may need to change

LESLIE BARKER
The Dallas Morning News



Every die-hard fitness fanatic cheers the benefits of eating right and exercising: Reduced risk of disease! Increased energy! A better sense of mental, physical, emotional self!

But there is a caveat to all that rah-rah: You can overdo it. While that won't necessarily negate what you're doing, it can make your lifestyle less effective than you might think.

To help you stop, we asked a couple of experts for specifics on how too much of a good thing can be bad for you. Megan Lyons recently opened a health-coaching company in Dallas. Kathy Dieringer is a board member of the Dallas-based National Athletic Trainers' Association.

WORKING OUT HARD EVERY DAY

The reason: "Our bodies need rest," Lyons says, "and performing high-intensity exercise every single day does not allow adequate time for muscle repair and recovery."

Adds Dieringer: "Rest between exercising is just as important as the exercise itself. If you don't allow your body to rest and recover between bouts, it will break down eventually."

The solution: If you must do something every day, make sure it's lower intensity, like a non-power walk or stretching, Lyons says.

Vary the intensity of your workouts, says Dieringer, owner of D&D Sports Med in Denton, Sanger and Aubrey, Texas. Take a few days off if you show such signs of overtraining as insomnia, restlessness, continued soreness, burnout or irritability. If you're injured, take time to heal.

"Moderation is tough, especially in those individuals who are high achievers and believe they must work out every day," Dieringer says. "I'd encourage everyone to keep a training log so they can look back on what they've been doing and objectively analyze their workout regimen."

SWEARING BY ONLY ONE EXERCISE OR ROUTINE

The reason: In addition to the boredom factor, doing the same workout over and over increases your risk of overuse injury, Lyons says.

Additionally, "you'll neglect other muscles. This often leads to muscle imbalances, which can cause or exacerbate injuries."

The solution: Try a new class, or exercise with a friend who does a workout you don't.

BELIEVING THAT PAIN EQUALS GAIN

The reason: Being sore is one thing; pain is another. Pain often signals an injury, which means you'll have to stop working out for a while.

The solution: Your body lets you know when it's time to rest and time to move, Dieringer says, so listen to it.

"Pushing through soreness is OK, as long as we're sure that's what it is, but you should not try to push through pain," she says. "Any type of soreness or discomfort that doesn't go away with rest and proper care after a few days should not be pushed through."

At that point, seek professional help, she says.

LOADING UP ON SPORTS DRINKS AND ENERGY BARS

The reason: You probably don't need these, which are geared for athletes exercising "under intense conditions for prolonged time periods," Lyons says. They contain excess sugar that can quickly add up and even counteract the workout.

In other words, you may be eating more than you're burning off.

The solution: Refuel with carb-heavy gels and drinks only when your workout lasts longer than an hour, or 30 minutes "in incredibly hot conditions," she says.

Your best bet for a beverage? Water.

THINKING GLUTEN-FREE IS A PANACEA

The reason: Gluten-free items are trendy but fall prey to what Lyons calls the "halo effect." That is, "causing us to assume anything labeled gluten-free is automatically healthy."

In many instances, they have "fewer nutrients, more calories and more sugar than the real thing," she says.

The solution: Unless your body has a true intolerance for gluten, you're better off choosing whole grains and whole-grain products without that gluten-free label, she says.

OVERDOING DIET PRODUCTS

The reason: Many are overly processed and contain additives and preservatives our bodies don't recognize as food, Lyons says.

"Even when a product is marketed as healthy or diet, the calories still add up," she says. Unfortunately, many of us think of these as "free food."

The solution: Choose a whole-food option such as a piece of fruit or a vegetable-based salad, she says.

STICKING WITH THE TRIED-AND-TRUE

The reason: Doing what we've always done or what we were taught as young athletes isn't necessarily valid, Dieringer says.

The solution: Do your research; seek advice from experts, not from fads. TS

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Hatha Adai Yoga

brings a new style of yoga to Saipan

THOMAS MANGLONA II
TAGA *Sports* Correspondent

Yoga has many benefits: It is a great way to de-stress, gives a person more balance, lowers blood pressure, and increases muscle mass and flexibility, according to Hatha Adai Yoga instructor Nicole Schafer.

These benefits are now available for Saipan residents to take advantage of, thanks in large part to the newly established Hatha Adai Yoga, which is owned and operated by Schafer, Kelli McDoulett, and Kate Cline-Campbell.

The new yoga studio is located on Middle Road Unit 103 next to American Nails and is open to people from all walks of life. If you've never done yoga before, this trio of yoga instructors is in town to add "downward dog to your day, and zip to your Zen!"

So far, the class already has a handful of daily customers. Schafer explained that with modifications, people can perform moves and do the stuff they would normally do in a class anywhere else. Classes that are offered every other Monday introduces new yoga students to the most basic moves.

The class is offered daily for people ranging from the beginner's level to advanced. Hatha Adai Yoga also offers hatha, yin, power, yoga-chi, and story time yoga for children. They even conduct classes in office spaces upon request.

Schafer said she and her team are excited to finally have their own space and share their passion for yoga with the island community.

They all have different reasons for why they do yoga.

"We all share the same feeling when I say there are many benefits to doing yoga and opening up the studio makes it more available for students here. With other studios closing down, this is where we offer the activity to anybody on the island," McDoulett said.

The first class costs $5 and following sessions cost $10.

The class also features "Saipan Sites," where classes are held at some of Saipan's famous tourist destinations, such as the CNMI Museum, Old Man by the Sea, and the Bird Island lookout.

The only things you'll need to bring to Hatha Adai Yoga are a positive and non-judgmental attitude, a water bottle, small towel for sweat, and a yoga mat.

Hatha Adai Yoga instructors, from left, Kelli, Nicole, and Kate demonstrate a progressive lotus leaf pose.

THOMAS A. MANGLONA II

INSTRUCTOR PROFILES

Although the program is new to the island, the owners and instructors of Hatha Adai Yoga are no strangers to the activity.

KELLI MCDOULETT leads a light-hearted class with a smile and strength, bringing casual conversation into her sessions to help students feel at ease. She currently works for the CNMI government and enjoys her time in the studio.

KATE CLINE-CAMPBELL, a registered dietitian and certified LEAP therapist, said her love for yoga stems from working with whole-body wellness, and caring for the body especially when it is injured or ill.

NICOLE SCHAFER, a teacher at Whispering Palms, has been practicing yoga and incorporating its philosophy into her life for years. "I believe time should be spent focusing on the present, finding meditation in everyday activities, and just enjoying life to its fullest," she said. "With that mentality, I strive to bring a sense of fun, freedom, and escape from a busy day to my classes."

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a brotherhood in the name

Yamagata, Evangelista make it to the World Series

THOMAS MANGLONA II
TAGA *Sports* Correspondent

Raymond Kenji Yamagata and Alfonso Evangelista have attended the same school and played almost every sport on the field together for the past 12 years.

Both of these young athletes are seniors at Mount Carmel School on Saipan and said that they fell in love with sports for as long as they could remember.

"When I was in the 6th grade my godfather asked me to play softball in a team. The next year I was playing volleyball. Before I knew it, I was active in so many sports that I really enjoyed," Yamagata said.

Evangelista, too, became involved in sports as a young elementary student and little league player. As a child, he would watch his father play on the field.

Both of these students are accomplished athletes in their schools. Four years ago, Evangelista was bestowed the title of Most Valuable Player of his school's basketball team. Yamagata received the same award in the same year for his involvement in the school's volleyball team.

As the years went by, both of these athletes became more serious in their games and pursued senior level sports memberships. They perfected their skills and strengthened their momentum with nearly four hours of practice every day.

Currently, Yamagata is a member of the "Jets" baseball team and Evangelista plays for the "Braves."

More recently, both were selected to travel to Bangor, Maine, with 20 other All-Star baseball players to compete in the 2014 Senior League Baseball World Series. Before making it to the international stage and playing against teams from across the globe, they competed side by side in the Philippines to represent the Asia-Pacific region.

At the World Series, the CNMI delegation played against teams from Hawaii, Canada, Virginia, and Bangor, Maine in their first division.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Members of the CNMI Team representing the Asia-Pacific Region Bangor, Maine huddle after a game in the 2014 Senior League Baseball World Series.

# of sports

Yamagata said he was "a little nervous" but confident and not intimidated to play against the best-of-the-best. "The most exciting game was against Canada. During that game we went all the way to the 13th inning. It was fun and very exciting."

Keiko Yamagata, a fan who traveled with the CNMI team, thought it was important to be at the game and support family members and team members. "The game was very challenging and exciting. Each game was a thrill. You could see all the fans just shouting and cheering throughout the entire game."

One of the challenges Evangelista and his teammates faced at the World Series was the weather. "It was so cold. We were not used to the weather. At some point we even had four shirts on while we were on the field."

Before entering the World Series this year, Yamagata played in the 2012 Vietnam district region tournament, where he earned the distinction of fastest base runner. Evangelista also played in the 2013 Philippines district region tournament.

These teen athletic prodigies both told TAGA *Sports* that they want to pursue a professional occupation in sports, but recognize the challenges that come with it.

"At the end of the day it is really going to be hard to become professional athletes after high school. But I know that I play for one reason only, and that is because I love the sport," Evangelista explained. "Sports isn't just a game to us, it's a part of life and our passion."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

LEFT: Raymond Kenji Yamagata, left, and chaperone Manny Evangelista pose for a photo in Bangor, Maine, before their first game of the World Series. **RIGHT:** Alfonso Evangelista, left, poses with fellow teammate Joseph Lifoifoi in Bangor, Maine.

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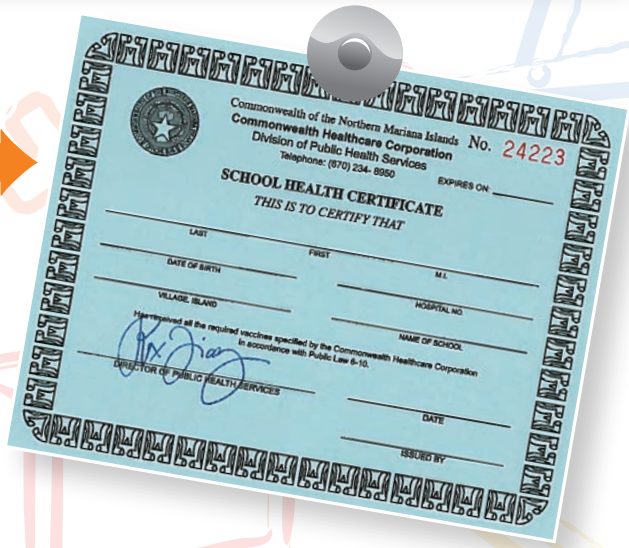

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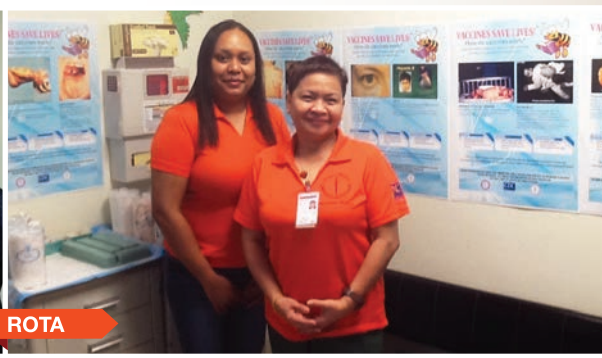

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Perry Lo has a simple answer as to why he still plays soccer at 70 years old. He said, "I love it."

Perry Lo: 60 years of soccer

JIMRAYPHAND
Special to TAGA *Sports*

Perry Lo had a simple answer to why he still plays soccer at 70 years old. He said, "I love it." As to how long he intends to keep playing, he said, "Well, if I can make another 10 years… that would be pretty good."

I suspect there are plenty of 70-plus-year-old men and women participating in very rigorous physical activity, but (truth be told) Perry is the only one I've bumped up against on the soccer pitch.

"I first came to Saipan in 1987 to do some work in the garment industry. Back then only the Koreans played soccer—we used to go play with them over there where the Joeten Kiyu library is now," he says with a proud glaze in his eyes. He left for several years and came back to the CNMI in 1995 when he decided make Saipan his home. As he puts it, "I realized how much I loved this place and so I came back for good."

Perry started playing soccer in Taiwan at 11 years old and with his 71st birthday just around the corner, he quite literally has been playing soccer for 60 years. "If I had a message, it's just to never give up…I'm already 70 years old and I still play." He admits however that, "I can't really run very well anymore and the players just keep running around me, but I keep trying—it's still fun."

At the conclusion of IFC's recent Champions League, Perry was awarded the League's "Old Fart" award. Perry was born in 1944. In contrast, IFC's other award recipient, the "Young Buck" awardee, was born in 1979—a cool 35 years apart.

Perhaps Perry has lost a step on the soccer field, but no doubt he stays several steps ahead of most of us on the general field of life. Here's to a follow up article 10 years from now—*Perry Lo: 70 years of soccer.*

iFC Posse: You Don't

The Independents Futbol Club (IFC) was founded with a simple goal to promote soccer in CNMI, but that wasn't all. Its founding members, a hodgepodge of volunteer soccer parents and friends, wanted to bring futbal to those with little opportunity to play it. Associated costs for playing in Saipan's (at that time) fledgling soccer league, as most any other soccer leagues around the world, included registration/entry fees along with costs for buying proper soccer gear such as shin-guards, shoes, and of course soccer balls…all of which presented a very real barrier to numerous kids in less affluent parts of the community. And so, the original IFC volunteers pooled what little resources they had with a few small donations to pay said costs and began holding open practices for elementary school-aged kids in Koblerville with a battle-cry motto of, "Everyone plays, nobody pays." It wasn't long before some kids who otherwise might have never played futbal emerged as legitimate contenders on the pitch and IFC took root as the little club that could.

Several years removed from the initial start-up of the club, co-founder, Greg Borja, found a way for IFC to up the ante on soccer clubs with a social conscience…this time with his sights set squarely on the slithering snake-pit of underage drinking and drunk driving. He states, "The goal of our club has never been solely about winning soccer games, but rather to facilitate participation in sporting activities that promote positive physical and behavioral health. As with athletic organizations in general, IFC and futbal offer a safe alternative to underage drinking and to drunk driving." Through a sub-grant from Project Brabu (via the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), IFC has expanded its mission to keep promoting soccer in the CNMI and to promote the prevention of underage drinking and drunk driving by providing safe, alternative activities. IFC's alcohol-free teams all tout jerseys with slogan's like, "You Don't Need Alcohol to Play Futbal" or simply, "Don't Drive Drunk" as a constant reminder for its players and the general community…and yes, players still play for free.

Most recently, IFC facilitated the development and participation of two teams in the Northern Marianas Football Association (NMIFA) M-League (Men's & Women's). First, the Thundercats debuted in the Men's 2nd Division with 20 players comprised mostly of 18-20 year olds. Additionally, the IFC Women, who turned out an impressive 30 participants ranging in ages from 15-40 years old, competed

Need Alcohol to Play Futbol

By Jim Rayphand and Greg Borja

not only in the Women's M-League, but also participated in the Futbal Association's Recreational 7-on-7 as well as the Beach Soccer leagues.

In addition to receiving skills development training, all team participants also participated in awareness discussions surrounding the harmful effects associated with Underage Drinking and the dangers of Drunk Driving throughout the project period. According to Borja, "Not only were players being given information about the risks of alcohol use, but they stayed involved in physical activities to minimize the effects of non-communicable diseases in our islands, such as childhood obesity."

In order to subsidize the club's dues and fees, the IFC-Posse conducted numerous beach cleanups, raising funds through MVA's Cash for Trash program. . . all in the spirit of a socially-conscious club. These activities were followed alcohol free gatherings. Finally, the IFC Posse hosted two additional tournaments this year including the Beach Soccer Fun Day and the Champions League.

The Beach Soccer Fun Day was held at the Fiesta Hotel beach with 30 participants, ages 15-20 years old (underage drivers), were randomly assigned teams and each team played in six games. The youth themselves served as game officials, building leadership skills and teamwork. Awards were given out for Golden boot- girls and boys (most goals scored) and Golden Glove (most saves by a goalkeeper). Recognition was given to all participants as "Alcohol Free Players."

The Champions league targeted men 35 years and older with games intended to build camaraderie among a diverse population of 66 players and to promote the prevention of Drunk Driving. The league lasted six weeks. At the close of the league awards were given out recognizing the youngest player who was born in 1979 and the oldest player was born in 1944 [see special feature on Perry Lo]. "It just goes to show that age should not be factor when you are promoting positive alternatives to living a healthy lifestyle", Borja says, "Our adult players have a responsibility to serve as role models and mentors to our youth."

Throughout the project period, youth data was collected to determine the perception of harm associated with underage drinking. Of those surveyed, 72% said it would be easy to get alcohol if they wanted some. While 88% feel that youth are at risk of harming themselves physically or in other ways. Adult data gathered during the project, showed that 67% felt that drinking five or more alcohol beverages per week put themselves at moderate risk of being harmed physically or in other ways.

ROSELYNB.MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

NATIBU SPORTS ASSOCIATION

teaching kids what a real 'win' looks like

The Little Rookies' Kingston C. Deleon Guerrero swings during one of NSA's tee ball tournaments.

I quit. No matter how many times I flip the pages, I could not find the word "win" on the list of Natibu Sports Association's goals.

Disappointed? No. Surprised? Yes. Meeting a sports group that does not promote the culture of winning is strange for someone who often sees teams move heaven and earth to get that Big W.

So if NSA does not care much about winning, what are the objectives of a group that began with a bunch of guys that formed a small softball team for the CNMI Labor Day Tournament in the mainland in 2008?

"We implement programs for the safety of our youth and community. We participate in outreach programs that would benefit us and our community. We empower our youth by getting them involved in sports and other worthwhile activities," NSA official Vincent Camacho said.

These programs serve residents of Tanapag, San Roque, As Matuis, and Capital Hill. Over a hundred children participate in the programs, which are implemented by volunteers—mainly residents of the four villages or parents who have children in NSA programs.

"NSA is a family with children and their parents working together and our office [near the Tanapag Middle School] serving as their second home," NSA official George Camacho said.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A young NSA member helps out in a cleanup drive at Tanapag Beach.

Cover Home

Baseball, the islands' most loved sport, is also the backbone of NSA's programs.

"For the past several years, we've been fielding three teams (Major, Senior, and Big League divisions) in the Saipan Little League Baseball. Our Little League squads (known as NSA Braves), some of their parents, and other volunteers are also participating in non-baseball, non-sports related activities that Natibu is involved in," Vincent said.

In baseball, according to Vincent, players are told to "cover home," protect the home plate from any runner crossing it. Natibu adopted "cover home" as its motto, encouraging its member to protect their community and their home from substance and alcohol abuse, crime, and violence.

"We can protect our community from these problems by providing our youth activities during their free time, especially after school hours and school vacation. Instead of letting our children roam the streets or stay at home doing nothing, we give them something to do," George explained.

Natibu youth members can go to the NSA office after school hours and practice their batting skills at the improvised batting cage located at the back of the association's office. Balls and other sports equipment can also be found at the NSA office.

"But they can only play or practice if they are done with their homework. Volunteers are at our office after school hours to supervise the kids and also check if they are through with their schoolwork. Sometimes, volunteers help out in the homework or even the players assist their fellow players in doing schoolwork," Vincent said.

When school is over or on a break, NSA hosts summer camps, holds Thanksgiving volleyball and youth fishing tournaments, and on a couple of occasions collaborated with the Division of Youth Services' Safe and Sober Youth Sports Tournament. However, NSA's most successful program during school break is its Tee Ball Tournament.

"We started the program four years ago for girls and boys in the 4 to 8 age group. It teaches them the fundamentals of baseball and sportsmanship at an early age. Because of the age of the kids, the Tee Ball program heavily involves the parents and other older members of the community as well. You have almost everybody at the field. Last year we had six teams and this year, we had eight with over 120 kids participating and learning the value of teamwork and staying active, while getting ready to play Little League baseball," Vincent said.

Youth empowerment

For the past several years, Natibu has been partnering with government agencies and non-profit groups in non-sports related events.

It sent youth members to the Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America Conference in Washington, D.C., joined Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality's tree planting and beach cleanup programs, adopted the Tanapag Beach area for regular maintenance, and participated in Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Awareness Month's walk.

Natibu youth members are also active in the Department of Public Safety's underage drinking law compliance check and education programs. Vincent said their youth members act as "undercover agents" for DPS and go to various stores on the island to find out if

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The NSA Braves celebrate after beating McDonald's in the semifinals of the Major division of the 2014 Saipan Little League Baseball at the Miguel "Tan Ge" Basa Pangelinan Ballfield.

businesses are selling liquor to under-21 individuals. Youth members also attend forums discussing the effects of underage drinking. They also assist the Department of Commerce with the Food and Administration's tobacco sales compliance inspections.

"Through these partnerships, our youth learn something about law enforcement and become aware of the harmful effects of underage drinking and other vices. They also realize they need to do something that will help keep our island clean and beautiful and they should start it within our community," Vincent said.

More than winning

After discussing almost all of Natibu's goals, the interview with the two officials of the sports group came to an end but with still no mention of the word "win."

But then I recalled two earlier interviews with Natibu members and realized that what they shared somehow represent NSA's accomplishments, which no amount of wins in any game or tournament can surpass or even equal.

"Natibu gives me something to look forward to after school and during school break. I get to play the sport I love, be with my friends and help younger kids play baseball. We don't need to worry about uniforms and equipment because NSA will be there to provide for us so we can concentrate on playing. We also have our families cheering for us every game," said Joseph Lieto Lifoifoi Jr., who has been a member of Natibu for six years.

Another member, Robin Sablan, who just joined Natibu as a volunteer parent in March this year, made it to the NSA family because of his two sons.

"They are active in NSA's events and its baseball teams and I believe these prevent them from getting into trouble. They are doing prevention and I am doing recovery," Sablan, who is brave enough to admit he had problems with drug abuse.

"I am a recovering addict and want to stay on track for my kids and my family. Every time they come home from practice and game, they are very happy to share what happened in their game, so I was encouraged to join the group, too. They are my role models because they are doing something worthwhile in their spare time. I would like to be a productive member, too, so I have a once-a-week meeting with some volunteers and parents and have round-table discussion about the effects of drugs and alcohol abuse at home and other related matters," Sablan said.

Has he had second thoughts about joining Natibu because of his past drug problems?

Sablan said no. "I know this is good for me, my kids, my family, and my community."

SAIPAN SOCCER SCHOOL hits its goals and vows to boost its programs

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

The Saipan Soccer School team members and coaches from the Chelsea FC Soccer School (Hong Kong) have their picture taken at the TSL Sports Complex.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Former Olympian and Chelsea FC Soccer School (Hong Kong) technical director Luam Khen Koo, center, who attended the inauguration of the Saipan Soccer School in 2011, chats with NMIFA president Jerry Tan, left, and EAFF general secretary Joo-Sung Kim during the latter's visit on Saipan early this year.

Saipan Soccer School's progress report card is out and it made the grade.

SSS delivered as promised, fulfilling what former Olympian and Chelsea FC Soccer School (Hong Kong) technical director Luam Khen Koo enumerated as the three main functions of the organization during the school's inauguration in 2011.

Koo said that SSS was created to (1) provide a venue for players' practice and games day and night, rain or shine; (2) teach beginners the basic of the sport, and (3) train coaches who will develop good players.

Goal No. 1? Check! Futsal games are being played at the facility inside the TSL Sports Complex, with both adults and youth, men and women competing in regular leagues and tournaments. Members of the CNMI Men's National Team even used the facility to train for the Asian Football Confederation

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

2014 Challenge Cup Qualifiers when Mother Nature prevented the squad from playing at the Oleai Sports Complex Field.

Goal No. 2? Another fat check! SSC has instituted a summer camp, arming children in the U8 and U10 age groups with the fundamentals of football. Majority of the graduates of the program now play in the Northern Mariana Islands Football Association's youth leagues, while selected ones even join the more advanced NMI National Elite Academy.

And Goal No. 3's bid to find individuals and equip them with the knowledge and expertise in coaching? That gets another resounding check! SSS and Chelsea FC Soccer School (Hong Kong) partnered in conducting regular clinics, covering both the theoretical and practical aspects of coaching. These clinics are usually done before NMIFA holds its spring and fall leagues, giving upcoming coaches a head start for the tough grind ahead.

Despite these accomplishments, SSS knows there is more room for improvement.

"We did good in our first three years, but we could and must do more in the coming years," SSS executive director Merlie Tolentino said.

Saipan Soccer School was created:

1. To provide a venue for players' practice and games day and night, rain or shine;
2. To teach beginners the rudiments of the sport; and
3. To train coaches who will develop good players.

Backing up NMIFA

Part of SSS' to-do-more list is to continue assisting NMIFA's national teams.

"Supporting our youth and women national teams' training is our most successful program in the last three years. SSS and Chelsea coaches assisted NMIFA in providing year-round training to these squads, which were able to make solid progress and success with their victories over Guam and Macau," said Jersh Angeles, one of the SSS coaches.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

TOP PHOTO: Saipan Soccer School staffs demonstrate warm up drills to students of Tanapag Head Start Center. **BOTTOM PHOTO:** Saipan Soccer School staffs conduct fun drills at the Kagman Head Start Center last year.

The CNMI U15 National Team won over Macau, 2-1, in the 2011 East Asian Football Federation U15 Youth Tournament in Taipei in July 2011 for the Commonwealth's first international victory and also a first in an EAAF-sanctioned event.

Several triumphs came after that historic victory. The CNMI U14 National Team prevailed against Chinese-Taipei and Macau in the AFC U-14 Boys' Festival of Football in Beijing in 2012 and versus Guam in AFC U14 Championship 2014 Qualifiers in April 2013, while the CNMI Women's National Team topped Macau in the Preliminary Round 1 of the 2015 EAFF East Asian Cup in Guam last July.

"We will continue to provide assistance to NMIFA and our national teams, while reaching out to more underprivileged players, helping various football clubs, assisting in developing coaches, and getting involved in different community projects," said Angeles.

To encourage players to join the sport, SSS goes as far as picking up children for practices and games and dropping them back home and, on some occasions, "baby-sitting" them while waiting for their parents.

My Pal Sports Fest, Head Start visits

While SSS is proud of its role in training the CNMI youth and national teams, Angeles and company admitted that the My Pal Sports Fest and visits to Head Start centers on Saipan hold a special place in their hearts.

The inaugural My Pal Sports Fest was held just in August this year, with SSS partnering with the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs and DCCA's Child Care Development Fund to hold a five-day sports festivity for children with disabilities. SSS coaches and its volunteers facilitated the nine-sports event for children in the 6 to 14 age groups. They did most of the demonstration, coaching, and officiating of basketball, badminton, bowling, table tennis, soccer, futsal, track and field, softball, and kayak racing events.

"I will never forget the time I spent with the special children during the 'My Pal Sports Fest.' I have a niece who has Down syndrome and the children at My Pal Sports Fest reminded me of her. I appreciate so much their talents and skills in sports," Angeles said.

Fellow coaches Angie Ito and Irish Pagarao treasure their experiences at the Head Start centers the most.

"During the Christmas program at the JMR Head Start, the kids made thank you cards and collages for the coaches. Some of them see us out and recognize us even when we're not in uniform and they will tell their parents about our visit and the good time they had. Their appreciation and the smiles on their faces mean a lot to me," Ito said.

"It made me feel good inside every time they get excited to see us coaches, and play with us. In one occasion, a player ran into me and said, 'Bye coach, I love you and thank you.' It's good to hear that we're appreciated and we're able to help them even in small ways," Pagarao said.

SSS coaches and staffs have visited Head Start centers for the past two years and also handed out learning materials to students, stressing the importance of education more than anything else.

"Just seeing the joy and smiles of the children is priceless. It brings me a sense of pride knowing that we as coaches can have an effect on these children's lives by introducing them to football (soccer). There are kids that we've groomed and watched grow as a player and person and seeing them like that is very rewarding," said Ruselle Zapanta, who completes the four Saipan-based SSS coaches.

These intangibles are more than enough to spur the soccer school and its coaches on.

"The kind words and appreciation we get from individuals and groups we are able to help will encourage us to continue and strengthen our programs," Tolentino said.

SPORTS CALENDAR

Tan Holdings

Tan Siu Lin Foundation

OCTOBER

MISO Boys Volleyball and Girls Basketball Leagues

High school teams, both in public and private, battle for bragging rights in basketball and volleyball.

Tan Holdings Open

This Northern Marianas Badminton Association-sanctioned tournament features competition in the mixed and men's and women's double events.

NMISF Season Opening Meet

This is Northern Mariana Islands Swimming Federation's first official competition for the 2014-2015 season and the island's swimmers aim to either equal or surpass the CNMI's national and age group records.

NOVEMBER

NMIFA Youth Football League Festival

Northern Mariana Islands Football Association will culminate the fall season of its youth league with a whole day of football festival for its U8, U10, and U12 teams.

Tan Holdings Tennis Classic

This annual tournament renews the rivalry of CNMI and Guam tennis players.

SSC All Schools Swimming Championships

Swimmers from elementary, middle school, and high school divisions flood the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool and battle in individual and relay races.

DECEMBER

Hell of Marianas

The premier bike race in the CNMI has the Commonwealth's top riders and representatives from Guam, Japan, Korea, Australia, and Russia negotiating the lung-busting 100-kilometer, around the island course.

12th FINA World Swimming Championships

The CNMI will participate in this short course tournament (25m) that will take place in Doha, Qatar

NMA Christmas Island Relay

A team of five runners alternate in completing the 13.7-mile race from the Pacific Islands Club in San Antonio to the Last command Post in Marpi.

This advertisement is sponsored by Tan Siu Lin Foundation

Who will be the CNMI's next Jericho Cruz?

JONATHAN PEREZ
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Name: Prince Factor
Age: 17
Height: 5'10"
Weight: 140lbs.
School: Marianas High School
Address: Saipan, CNMI

Name: Chris Mizer
Age: 18
Height: 6'0"
Weight: 190lbs.
School: Western Oregon University
Address: Monmouth, OR

Jericho Cruz successfully making it to the Philippine Basketball Association has become an inspiration to a lot of rising basketball players who are hoping to follow the path of the former CNMI national team cager.

The 22-year-old Cruz has come a long way since learning how to dribble and shoot a basketball at the Garapan open court, before gradually finding his way into the Philippine basketball scene—a decade-long journey that saw him slowly transition from an offensive-minded player into a multidimensional cager that carefully chooses his shots and knows how to involve his teammates offensively.

Now a new breed of young players are eager to follow in his footsteps and make their own mark. TAGA *Sports* asked two of the Commonwealth's respected coaches—veteran bench tactician and trainer Elias Rangamar and Joe Diaz of the Rollers basketball program—of who they think will be the next player that will put the CNMI on the basketball map.

Rangamar coached Cruz when the young gun played for the CNMI's men's national basketball team while Diaz guided the former Adamson University standout in his formative years under the then-Garapan Rollers basketball program. They are united in saying that the CNMI doesn't lack the talent that could produce the same type of player that has the caliber and skills of the ex-Marianas High School Dolphin.

Rangamar believes Little Leaguer-turned-basketball player Chris Mizer and Kobee Mendoza as the two most probable candidates that could follow Cruz's footsteps.

"[Mizer and Mendoza] are at the right age and they got the experience. And from what I see, especially in the youth league, they have good height as well. There are other players, most of them are under Joe Diaz's program," said Rangamar, who coached Mizer in the 2014 Pohnpei Micronesian Games.

He said both players usually come to the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium every day after school to ask for his advice and guidance. "I coached Chris when he was a member of the CNMI National basketball team in this year's Micro Games. Kobee always joins us in our practices. But I still coach and guide them [Mizer and Mendoza] in various drills. They also work out with us in lifting weights in the gym. They're always here after school."

Rangamar said he never asked Mizer why he switched from baseball to basketball while in the case of Mendoza, his father Edsell is the major influence in him picking up the sport.

And according to Mizer's mother, Thelma, he just let go of baseball after returning from his stint with the CNMI Junior League team in the 2009 Junior League Baseball World Series in Taylor, Michigan.

Name: Kobee Mendoza
Age: 16
Height: 6'0"
Weight: 155lbs.
School: Marianas High School
Address: Saipan, CNMI

Name: Mike Arciaga
Age: 17
Height: 5'11"
Weight: 150lbs.
School: Marianas High School
Address: Saipan, CNMI

"He just fell in love with basketball. I know he played [Little League] baseball, but he just came here and played basketball every day."

"He worked on his shooting, drills and started lifting weights. I never asked him how and why he just suddenly fell in love with basketball. I don't know why, I never asked him," Thelma said.

Rangamar believes self-motivation helped Mizer improve his skills quickly. "I just help them but Chris is self-motivated and I think that is one of the reasons why he excelled. He doesn't just wait for the coach's instructions but he also comes and works hard to hone his skills."

Mizer went back to the U.S. mainland a few weeks ago for his sophomore year at Western Oregon University where he will try out to earn a spot on the Wolves' roster.

Rangamar said both Mizer and Mendoza need to be stronger and faster, and work harder on their defense. "They need to work on their footwork defensively. I've kept on pushing them during practice. They practice a lot of offense and I think they've a little bit neglected their defense."

He said both players are open to all his suggestions. "I was on their case last game, picking apart their plays. But they are open to everything what I'm saying, whether good or bad."

That's why Mizer and Mendoza doubled their efforts in hitting the weight room to work on their conditioning. "They need to get stronger defensively, especially Chris since there will be a lot of taller and bigger guys than him."

Mendoza already went to the Philippines a few years ago where Cruz introduced him to some of the collegiate basketball coaches. "But [Mendoza] needs to play like a big point guard, just like Jericho when I was working with him," said Rangamar. "I told Kobee, 'You've got to work on being a big point guard, there's no way that you will play forward in the Philippines. You also need some height if you want to be a shooting guard.'"

Diaz, meanwhile, singled out three of his current players in the Rollers program: Mike Arciaga, Prince Factor, and Irvin Malonzo.

"We have a lot of players here but I think these three can make it and be like Jericho in college. But they need to be dedicated, show discipline and work hard for it," said Diaz, a certified Level 1 coach by the International Basketball Federation.

Factor is the son of Leo, a veteran player in various basketball leagues on Saipan. He is on his fourth year under Diaz's program.

Diaz said that basketball coaches of the University of the Philippines-Diliman, one of the top research state institutions in Manila, had shown interest in tapping the 5-foot-10 cager. UP is one of the founding members of the UAAP, where Cruz once played for the Adamson University Falcons.

"We played against UP in a tournament in Guam last year and they [UP coaches] saw Prince play and wanted to invite him to someday try out," said Diaz in a telephone interview.

He said Factor needs to bulk up so he could keep pace with the level of play in the Philippines. "We need to fine-tune his game and he needs to hit the gym for some weight training."

Arciaga, meanwhile, just turned 16 and is a 5-foot-11 cager that can play multiple positions.

"He is now on his third year with the Rollers but he showed that he knows his role inside the court. He can also play mind games with his opponent but he needs to work hard on his shooting," Diaz said.

He believes Malonzo is more of a playmaker since the 5-foot-8 Marianas High School standout has a good vision of reading the defense and creating plays or scoring situations against their opponents.

"But he needs to grow a little bit taller. He already knows 50 percent of the basic stuff in playing. All he needs is consistency," Diaz said.

Tinian and Rota also have some hidden talent still waiting to be discovered. But one thing's for sure, Cruz's achievements have stoked the dreams of a large number young basketball players, that with hard work and determination one can someday make it big in their chosen sport.

ANEKKA SAKOVICH

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Don't be fooled by her California girl looks. Anneka Sakovich is an island girl through and through.

The daughter of Northern Marianas Sports Association Hall of Famers Bill and Jean Sakovich and the younger sister of Olympian Jonathan Sakovich, the now 40-year-old Anneka was born and raised on Saipan.

The 1988 NMSA Athlete of the Year saw action in half a dozen or so regional competitions as a swimmer, including the 1985 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships in Tokyo, Japan; the 1987 South Pacific Games in New Caledonia; the 1990 Micronesian Games on Saipan; the 1991 South Pacific Games in Papua New Guinea; the 1994 Micronesian Games in Guam; and the 1995 South Pacific Games in Tahiti; and as a triathlete in the 2003 Pacific Games in Suva, Fiji, and the 2005 Pacific Mini Games in Koror, Palau.

Anneka took home medals in Tahiti in 1995, Fiji in 2003, and Palau in 2005.

To this day, she still considers finally medaling in French Polynesia in 1995 as her most memorable regional meet.

"Our swim team was fortunate to get lots of support from the Saipan community and local businesses, especially when the South Pacific Games rolled around every four years. Having the support of the community behind us was motivation to train and compete harder and faster. My brother brought home several medals from New Caledonia in 1987, so I always felt I needed to bring one home, too, to show that their support and our hard work had paid off, and was happy to finally be able to do so in 1995."

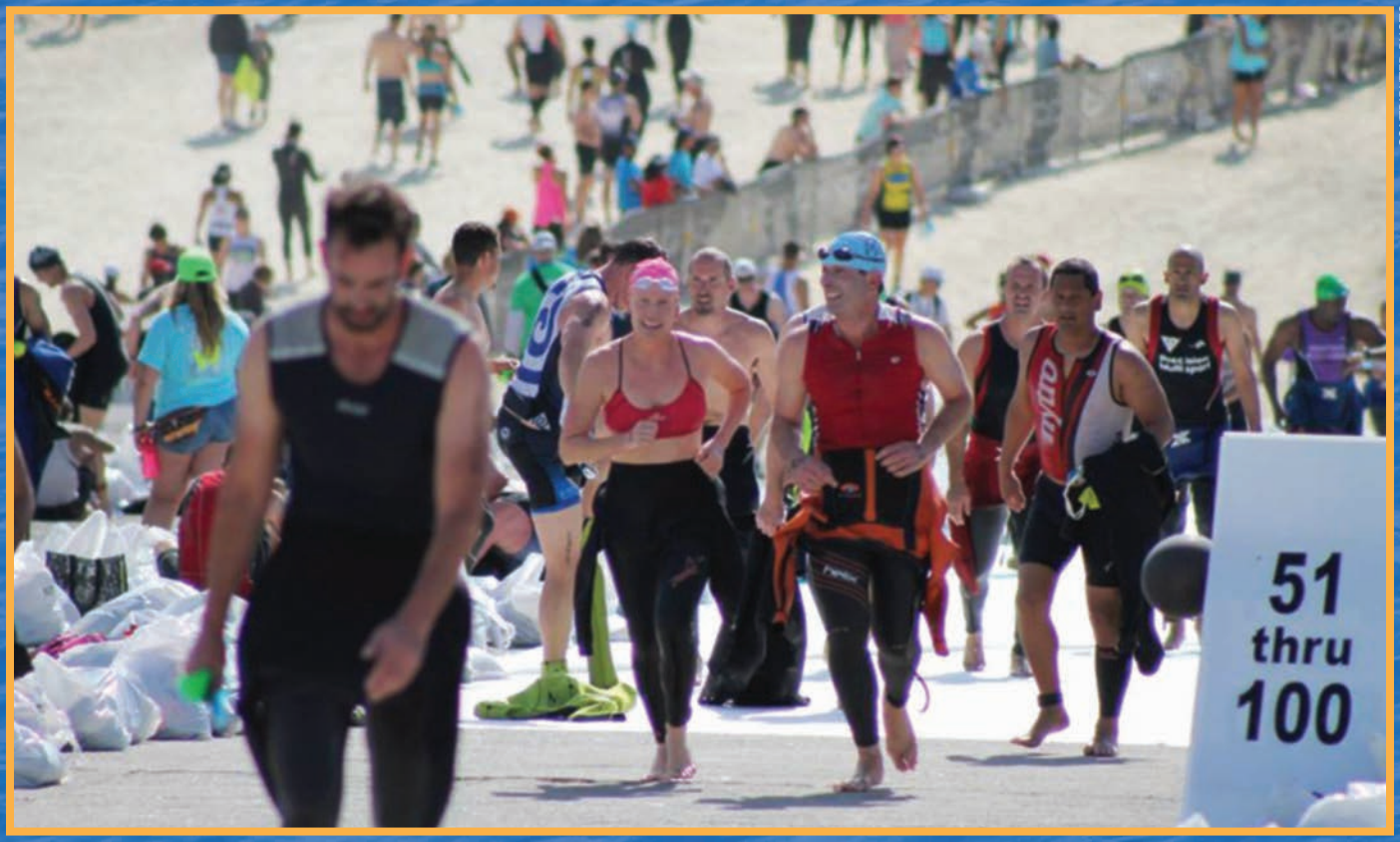
Beachcomber

Instead of Disneyland, this alumna of Grace Christian Academy had the sun-kissed beaches fronting the Philippine Sea as her playground growing up. She didn't really miss out on famous rides like Alice in Wonderland and Autopia because she more than made up for it with jet skis and sailboat excursions on the weekends.

"Having been born and raised [on] Saipan, my upbringing was a little different from many of my friends I hang out with today. My childhood memories are a little more exotic and adventurous."

Since her mother worked at the Saipan Beach Hotel and her father co-owned a beach rental concession, Anneka said her daily playground were actually the beaches of the Saipan Beach Hotel (now Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan) and Hyatt Regency Saipan in Garapan.

"I played with the Japanese tourists and often took them shopping. I dug the beach for clams and sold them to the hotel chef. I



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

File photo shows Anneka Sakovich transitioning from the swim leg of the Wildflower Half Iron Distance Triathlon in May 2014.

rode the boats back and forth for Managaha transfers. I played on the jet skis and sailboats and had sea cucumber fights on the beach with my friends. My friends climbed coconut trees, dropped them down and we'd crack them open and drink them whenever we felt like it. The silly thing is that as a child you are too young to realize what you have and not take it for granted that you are living in a tropical paradise. We didn't have all the latest and greatest toys on the Toys 'R Us commercials from tape-delayed TV programs coming out of California, but we had all sorts of other things to do and places to explore."

Born swimmer

Being born to swim coaches and founders of the Saipan Swim Club, you can say Anneka already knew how to swim even before she took her first step.

"Really, swimming was my life. There were not many developed sports at the time and, as a child of swim coaches, I usually ended up wherever they were—at the pool, in the ocean. I attended summer camps where other sports were introduced and, of course, I played whatever sports were offered in PE at school. Running and weight training were always a part of my workouts and supplementary to my swim training. I also performed Polynesian dance at the hotels under Lorraine Johnson with the Holomua Dance Troupe all through my teens and beyond. This also helped with my overall fitness level."

With her inborn talent, she dominated many local and interisland meets against archrival Guam, which led to her becoming a staple in the CNMI national swimming teams in the '80s and '90s.

Anneka also considers being the daughter of NMSA Hall of Famers a plus rather than an anchor that could've dragged her down because of the weight of expectations.

"I am quite honored to be the daughter of NMSA Hall of Famers and am very proud of the influence and impact that my parents have had, not only in the Marianas but also the rest of Micronesia and Pacific Games island nations. This is who they are and will continue to be. It did not stop when they left Saipan in 2004."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Anneka Sakovich joins local kids and Fr. Arnold.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Anneka hangs out at a beach on Saipan.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Anneka aboard the boat *Normar.*

College and beyond

Anneka left her tropical paradise in 1989 when she went to school in Hilo, Hawaii. She went on to college at the University of California in Santa Barbara in 1992 before moving, semi-permanently, to Japan in 1996.

"I came home at least once a year, even more when I was living in Japan. It wasn't until my parents left in 2004 that I felt I also had left Saipan, and it was no longer 'home.' In 2003 I also moved from Japan back to Southern California to continue my education and find my career. I was still trying to find my 'passion' and sports just kept opening up new doors for me."

For Anneka, it seemed like sports always had a way of coming back to her life.

"Sports will always be a part of me, both as a lifestyle and as a career. Though I have dabbled in a couple other industries, I find my way back to sports in one way or another. When I moved to Japan to improve my Japanese and find my way in International Business, I found work teaching English at the corporate level to get my foot in the door."

To supplement her morning and evening English lessons, she picked up some "fun" extra work as a lifeguard and swimming teacher at the Tokyo American Club.

"While in Japan I had the opportunity to spend two weeks working at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano. After three years of balancing English teaching, lifeguarding, and a full summer schedule of teaching swimming lessons, sports became my full-time job when I became manager of the Aquatics Department during my last three years in Tokyo."

Sports organizer

Like her father, who is one of the founders of Tagaman, the oldest triathlon event in Micronesia, Anneka eventually found herself in the business of organizing sports events.

This time it was not swimming that put her

foot in the door of sports events organizing but her new passion—triathlon.

"I left Japan in 2003 and returned to Southern California. At this time I was training for the triathlon at the 2003 Pacific Games in Fiji. Since I was still new to the sport I participated in as many events as possible to prepare. Realizing that I may have finally found my passion, I showed up at one event and asked, 'How do I get involved and do what you guys do?' Next thing you know I was working triathlons and running events all over Southern California and on Catalina Island."

To make it formal, Anneka studied and graduated in 2007 with a master's degree from the University of San Francisco in Sports Management, a two-year program with classes in Southern California and designed for working individuals.

"I worked full time with Southern California Aquatics, a masters swim program, and worked events on the weekends for two years before landing myself a full-time job in events production in 2006."

During her more than seven years as operations director of Renegade Racing, the up-and-coming events management company grew from producing three events a year to over 30 events a year around Southern California. Renegade Racing produces triathlons of all distances—5K/10Ks, half and full marathons, adventure races, and mud runs.

Now newly married and living in Manhattan Beach, California, Anneka left her full-time position as operations director at Renegade Racing in March 2013 to freelance and work on other projects and events.

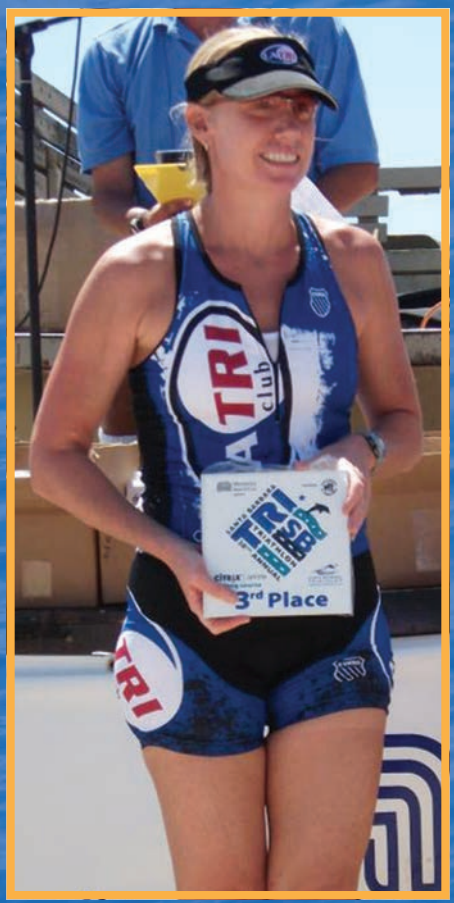
"I still continue to work on many of Renegade Racing's events, but now I also work with other events and organizations and have further broadened my experience and event range. Now working from home I have a better balance of work and training!" she said.

Some of the events Anneka is currently working on include the LA Marathon, Surf City Marathon, Divas Half Marathon Series, Hollywood Half Marathon, and the Gladiator Rock' N Run.

Always an athlete

Being a freelancer, Anneka now has more time to train and indulge in her favorite sports of swimming, triathlon, and running.

"I continue to race triathlons, half marathons, and open water swims. I just did the Wildflower half iron distance tri in May. I am competitive in open water swimming races and often place in the Top 3 in my age group at events. My favorite events are the Hermosa to Manhattan Beach Pier to Pier Swim (2 miles) and the La Jolla Rough Water Swim (3 miles). I think being an active athlete has helped me be as successful in my career as I am today. As both an athlete and a producer of events, I experience and understand both sides of the event, both from the athletes' and organizers' perspective and that helps me be a better producer of events."



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Anneka Sakovich wins third place in the Santa Barbara Triathlon in 2011.

Her advice to those who want to go into sports events management is to pursue it with as much vigor as you would if you want to win a race or any competition.

"Just as it takes discipline to train hard, work hard, and balance school, sports and life, all those transfer into how you pursue any career. Athletes are driven people by nature. If sports management is your passion, learn about it, experience it, and put yourself out there. Sign up to volunteer or look for internships available with various sport organizations. If you are on Saipan and see a need in sports with no internship or job available, offer to create one!"

More and more universities in the U.S. mainland are offering undergraduate Sports Management or Sports & Recreation Management degrees, in addition to post-graduate Sports Management degrees.

A Sports Management degree touches on all aspects of the business of sport and includes those interested in Event Management, Sports Accounting, Team Sports, Collegiate Sports, Professional Sports, Sports Marketing & Media Relations, Coaching, Health & Fitness Center Management, Philanthropy, and more.

"Once you get your foot in the door in sport, you become part of that sports network, which is huge. Networking is the key in anything you do. Networking has landed me numerous opportunities. You just need to be ready to put yourself out there and show people what you can do. I am grateful that I have been able to turn a lifelong passion for sports into a career. And yes, having sporty parents has helped too!"

Those who want to ask Anneka personally about her career as a sports events organizers don't have to wait long, as she plans to visit her tropical paradise soon.

"Thank goodness for Facebook. I follow my friends on the island and look forward to their postings of the beautiful sights and sunsets. There is so much I miss about Saipan, and I'm working on a visit within the next year. I look forward to bringing my husband out and showing him the hidden gem that Saipan is." TS

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

LEFT PHOTO: Anneka Sakovich participates in the Hermosa to Manhattan Beach Pier to Pier Swim in 2011. **RIGHT PHOTO:** She takes part in the Huntington Beach Pier Swim this year.

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